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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Marketing Administration  
Washington, D. C.

September 16, 1942

ADMINISTRATOR'S MEMORANDUM NO. 31

Criticism of Other Government Agencies

In a recent letter to the heads of all Departments and agencies the President cautioned against discordant public comment by federal officials. The letter stated in part:

"In dealing with the many complex war problems which we face today, it is unavoidable that there be wide differences of opinion between agencies of the Federal Government -- opinions sincerely and honestly held. However, too often in recent months, responsible officials of the Government have made public criticism of other agencies of the Government; and have made public statements based either on inadequate information or on failure to appreciate all the aspects of a complex subject which is only partially within their jurisdiction.

"This is inadvisable at any time. But in times of war it is particularly contrary to public policy. It contributes only to the confusion of the public, which naturally does not know what to believe on an involved issue when it gets different stories on successive days from officials of equal standing, though not necessarily of equal understanding.

"This feeling is of course pounced upon, exploited, and intensified by opponents of our war effort. Our enemies use this raw material of discord provided for them by men who ought to be making trouble for the enemy and not for one another.

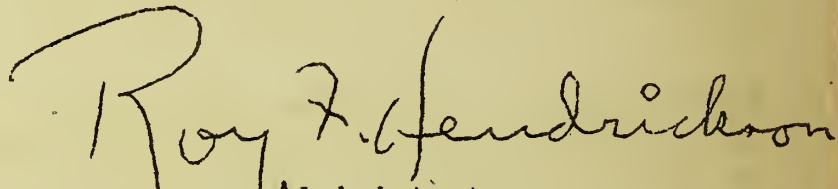
"When honest differences of opinion exist no one would propose to suppress them. Nor would anyone attempt to interfere with the free use by every public official of the normal processes of information to the public and press. But it is no solution to a controverted question to argue it out in public. If the agencies would refrain from resorting to public debate of this kind they would have a good deal more time to attend to their business, and the nation would have a good deal more assurance that that business was being done right.

"These differences between agencies often deal with matters of fact which can be harmonized by fuller investigation, or questions of policy which should be adjusted by conference between the agencies or

by reference to me as the responsible head of the Government. Disagreements either as to fact or policy should not be publicly aired, but are to be submitted to me by the appropriate heads of the conflicting agencies. The policy of the government should be announced by me, as the responsible head thereof. Disagreements as to facts can be resolved, if necessary, by investigations and surveys directed by me."

The President has emphasized one of the canons of sound administrative action. That is, if a dispute cannot be settle by negotiation at one level, it should be carried up through the successive levels of the administrative set-up until it is brought to the attention of the person having authority over both parties involved in the dispute. To illustrate, if two section heads are at odds over a course of action, the matter should be placed before the Division head for settlement. If two branch heads differ the matter should be brought to my attention for decision. If there is a conflict between agencies within the Department the Secretary will make a final determination.

The President's order is not an attempt to close, to the public, channels of information concerning the conduct of their government. It is not and should not be considered an attempt to interfere with the legitimate flow of news to the press and public. It says, in effect, take your differences of opinion to the person in authority who has power to take action. Do not raise a futile and disturbing outcry to confuse the public and make the wartime job of government more difficult.

  
Administrator